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CURRENT PERIODICAL LITERATURE.

THE NOTION OF MERIT IN THE HISTORY OF THEOLOGY. By WM. RUPP, D.D.; *The Reformed Church Review*, October, 1897, pp. 444-68.

THE words *merit* and *demerit* are now used in a moral sense, denoting quality of an act rather than of character. The theological sense is closer to the etymological signification, which is the reward due for services performed, especially those of the soldier. The Roman law was that obligation could be met by meritorious services: hence the words *solvere*, to pay a man's debt; or *satisfacere*, to satisfy his creditor by a meritorious service rendered either by himself or others. Tertullian employed the word in this latter sense, and often in his time it became the prevailing usage of the word merit in the church. Christ's work had not, in the earliest ages of the church, been regarded so much as a *quid pro quo* satisfaction for sin as a deliverance from death and a healing power for the soul. But from the time of Tertullian the idea of satisfaction, an equipollence for sin, prevailed. Thence baptism was delayed so that all sins committed before would be forgiven. The juridical notion of merit held by the church was modified by the idea of the citizen in relation to the ruler of the state. The latter could satisfy for offenses only by giving money or services. The value of the service depended upon the relative importance of the one conferring it. And when offense was committed, the subsequent discharge of ordinary duty could not make amends. Extraordinary services, either by the offender himself or procuring them by the payment of money, were the only ground of merit. This modified notion of the word was further colored by the Saxon usage, according to which both guilt and satisfaction for it could be transferred. The members of a tribe were held responsible, and could act or suffer for each other; but the offense and satisfaction were in proportion to the dignity of the parties involved. The demerit of sin is infinite because committed against God. Hence only an infinite person could atone for it. But his merits could be transferred, and hence be procured by others. Those who had no merits could procure them by extra service or by proxy.

In the view of the church the necessity for an atonement arose from the opposition between justice and mercy. The divine wrath must be appeased, that is, justice be satisfied, before any grace could be bestowed. But the scholastic doctrine held that no one obtains eternal life without, in some way, deserving it. Christ's death procures the merits; the church holds the treasury of them, and can transfer them at her pleasure. Men may add to that treasury by works of supererogation. Salvation comes not through forgiveness, but through merits. No man can know when he is forgiven, or be certain of his salvation, because he can never know whether he has done enough to merit it. The doctrine of Anselm was that of satisfaction by Christ; while Abélard taught that his suffering is a proof of God's love, and is the source of our merit. Lombard, however, taught that no man can gain happiness without personally meriting it. Aquinas held that there are two kinds of merit: *de condigno*, that is, intrinsic, which Christ alone possessed; and *de congruo*, which is from grace. The two must be united, and the former can be bestowed only by transfer. Duns Scotus taught that merit and demerit, like all other moral qualities, even truth itself, depend upon the will of God. Therefore the atonement is only an arbitrary arrangement, and God can accept any service or penance, personal or vicarious, as well as the atonement itself. By this view the flood gates were opened in the church to good works, transferable without regard to character. As the church was the custodian of all merits, she could give them to whom, and for what cause, she pleased. Men get from God a reward for what they have acquired, and are meritorious for what they possess—not for what they are in themselves. These lax views were confirmed by the Council of Trent, and had already been the warrant for the doctrine of indulgences, which hastened the Reformation. This revolt was based on justification by faith in the merits of Christ, which doctrine held firmly the juridical idea. But merits are ours solely by grace, not by individual desert; and can be transferred from Christ to us only by the will of God and of his free grace. There can be no merit in any man from his own works. These are only the proof of what has been done for him, and by which he is enabled to become a new creature. Calvin in his Institutes, and the several confessions, held that the atonement is a satisfaction for sin, because God forgives men for the sake of Christ's completed work. This is a basis for their new life, which shall be such as to fit them for happiness by building up a character in conformity with the divine law which has already

been satisfied. These views, with slight modifications, are held by all evangelical churches up to the present time.

That there is the juridical notion in the divine government cannot be doubted. That vicarious atonement denotes a transfer of guilt, either as symbolical, in the case of all sacrifices but that of Christ, or as real, in his case, cannot be denied. It could have no other conceivable purpose. For, if no sin had been committed, no atonement would be demanded. Christ assuredly would not assume our sins for display, nor suffer for them without effecting some adequate result. The tendency of evangelical thought is certainly averse from the idea of merit for any work save that of Christ, and for any suffering by him except penal. We agree with the author of this admirable paper fully in the view that what is required for eternal life is not merit, either personal or transferred, but fitness. If the individual character is not built up by the agent acting through the responsibility imposed by freedom, he cannot be happy in this life or in the life to come. That fitness, while it possesses no *merit* in itself, is the warrant that God's free gift of pardon, as the reward for Christ's travail, has not been misapplied.

But we hold that the entire revelation, whether in the written word or in nature, is one of vicarious suffering. The obligation to duty is complete and perpetual; and when this is violated, some atonement must be made. This cannot be by the sinner who has offended, since no subsequent obedience to what he is perpetually bound can atone for the past offense. This must be by vicarious suffering, voluntarily assumed, and which is sufficient to pay the penalty. The Divine Lawgiver who himself established the law says: "Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one iota of this law can pass away until it all be fulfilled." If the punishment for sin be voluntarily assumed, it must be transferred. And it cannot be borne unless it be assumed. If we are saved by grace, not of ourselves, but the gift of God, then we are saved because of what someone else has done whose merits are transferred to us. By virtue of these merits we are accounted guiltless of all past offenses, and placed in a position where we can work out our own salvation; the spirit working in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. The boasting which anyone who was saved by merit could justly indulge is excluded by the law of faith.

This article, as its title indicates, is a history of the use of the word *merit* in the Christian church, the shades of meaning it has assumed, and the influence which, in its

varying significations it has exerted ; and, lastly, the author's view of the correct interpretation which should be given to it in relation to our spiritual life.

This is a timely article, and one of great value. But it is so terse in style, and so packed with matter, that a fair synopsis would equal it in extent.

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THE ATHEISM OF RELIGIONS. By J. H. CROOKER ; *The New World*,
September, 1897, pp. 519-31.

THE term atheism in this article does not mean philosophic doubt, superficial denial, or positive rejection of theism, but an arrested reverence which, failing to trace divineness throughout the universe, relegates portions of nature and humanity to a power other than God or a realm outside the kingdom of order. The Persians had intense faith in God, but their belief in Angro-Mainyus shows an atheistic gap in the divine order which modern science with its doctrine of evolution and of the place which sin and pain hold in the perfecting of life enables us to fill, offering a thought of God commensurate with the universe. The Brahmans, as represented in the Upanishads, had an acute and spiritual conception of God, but failed to find him in the natural and the human ; there is as much atheism in the denial of those material realities with which modern science deals as in the denial of spirit, and the caste system is but a denial of God in man, an atheism of the blackest character. Buddhism reverences man, but does not rise to faith in the universal soul incarnating itself in humanity, and by its warfare against desire, which can properly be interpreted only as a divine urgency within the soul, inculcates an atheistic philosophy of nature and denies the real divinity of man. Christianity is atheistic when it ignores the real and abiding presence of God in the world by conceiving of him as visiting the world only in occasional miracles, when it arrays justice against love, as in popular theories of the atonement, or restricts the divine fatherhood to the person of Jesus or the souls of the regenerate alone. We shall have a wholly theistic Christianity only when we recognize that all men are identical in essence with God, and that humanity, not Jesus alone, is the sphere of the divine incarnation. "The richest fruitage of the spirit is a thought of God that links itself with all that is beautiful in nature, that embraces all souls in its providential ministries, that finds revelation wherever truth is discovered and divine service wherever